MRS. E. W. PARKER

(LOIS LEE PARKER)

MISSIONARY TO INDIA

PRICE THREE CENTS

Woman's Foreign Missionary Society
Methodist Episcopal Church

Publication Office
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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By FLORENCE L. NICHOLS

SO associated with India is the life history of Mrs. Parker that we almost forget her early years in Vermont; her splendid family heritage; her experience as a school teacher. In March, 1856, Lois Lee married Edwin Wallace Parker. Mr. Parker's theological course was not completed, but the young wife joined him in his work at the Bible Institute in Concord, N. H. After graduation, the first pastorate was an uncomfortable one; the parsonage was extremely poor and the parish small and scattered. "But my good wife," so writes Mr. Parker, "said it was all right and good, and so we went to work."

In that spirit, Mrs. Parker has been at work ever since. Sixty-one years of continuous service at home and in India have been characterized by cheerful, energetic consecration to the Master's service and Mrs. Parker is still at work.

The call to India came during this first year of pastoral work. Mr. Parker was commissioned in February, 1859, and April sixteen of that same year they sailed from Boston. Mr. and Mrs. Parker had no thought of ever returning to the home land, so it was a final farewell to friends and family. A hundred days in a sailing vessel, fifty days over land from Calcutta brought them to Lucknow. Although suffering much bodily discomfort on the voyage, yet "the

Parkers" completed during that tedious trip an extended course of history and studied Hindustani.

In telling of the next forty years, it is impossible to separate the work of Mrs. Parker from that of Bishop Parker. To the Indian missionaries, they were always "the Parkers." Wherever they lived, there was always a New England home, comfortable, economically and efficiently managed; with an atmosphere of Christ-like service. Fortunate were the young missionaries who could have a few days of rest in that home. Bishop Parker at his desk, Mrs. Parker making cookies in the dining-room—that is a picture many love to recall. But the periods of cookie-making were all too few, Mrs. Parker did her full share of missionary work.

To return to the early days in India; Mrs. Parker's first home was in Bijnour, a new station opened that year, 250 miles from Lucknow. The journey was made in a wagon drawn by horses part of the way but the last weary 180 miles the travellers were carried in a palanquin at the rate of three miles an hour. Almost immediately Mrs. Parker started a school and soon had twenty girls in her classes. In October, 1916, the Lois Lee Parker Memorial was dedicated, a new school building in Bijnour. Mrs. Parker was present and compared the work of Bijnour with that tiny beginning fifty-seven years before. Almost the first day in the Parker's new home, family prayers were held with the servants. This custom is still con-

tinued and each morning Mrs. Parker gathers her Indian family around her at a household altar. If there were time to speak of the many Indian men and women who can truly call her "mother," of the girls whom she has helped to prepare for service, of the boys who have grown up to be preachers and teachers under her influence, it would be a long, inspiring story.

Famine came to Bijnour in 1860 and fever to both Mr. and Mrs. Parker. Mrs. Parker was seriously ill and Mr. Parker had smallpox. Their appointment was changed while Mr. Parker was recovering in the hills and Mrs. Parker alone moved their goods to Lakhimpur, settled affairs in Bijnour and started the Christian farmers from Bijnour to Lakhimpur, for this new appointment was the founding of a Christian agricultural colony.

We cannot speak more of the next few years—years so full of disappointments and illness that stouter hearts would have been dismayed. Finally, it was decided that they must return home. Mrs. Parker had had fever almost continuously for six years. "We do not leave India," so wrote Dr. Parker in his diary, "because we are afraid to die, but because we love India and want to live for India."

During their furlough in America, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was organized. It was Dr. Parker who conceived the idea of the co-ordinate Branches and who wrote the constitution. All through his life, he joined Mrs. Parker in helpful

council and loyal support of this Society both at home and in India.

Mrs. Parker regained her health sooner than did her husband but at last they were able to return to India. During this second period of service—twelve years and three months—Mrs. Parker's home was in Moradabad and there she founded the girls' school. Again the fever, and in 1883 "the Parkers" were obliged to come home. The journey through Palestine was a great joy to Mrs. Parker but how she sorrowed to leave her hundred and sixteen girls of the Moradabad school. In September of 1884, however, she was back in the old home and school. For nearly thirty years her home was in Moradabad. The first conference after Bishop Parker's death, Mrs. Parker was appointed to city evangelistic work there. A woman, less brave, could not have gone back to a station so full of memories.

In 1891, Dr. Parker was appointed to Oudh district, but the conference asked Mrs. Parker to remain in charge of Moradabad school. That year of separation was hard for them both. Dr. Parker was not well and missed his home. During their residence in Lucknow — 1892-1897 — Mrs. Parker and Miss Thoburn came into close fellowship. Mrs. Parker's interest in the girls of India was very marked and she sympathised with Miss Thoburn in her plans for the development of the college. It is very fitting that one of the Lal Bagh buildings bears the name of Mrs. Parker. August 21, 1909, the corner stone of the Lois Parker

High School was laid in the Lal Bagh compound, just fifty years after the arrival of the Parkers in India. Mrs. Parker was present and spoke at the ceremony and again in May, 1913, she spoke at the dedication of the completed building.

The fourth period of their service in India was spent in Shajahanpur. Another W. F. M. S. school had Mrs. Parker's developing influence. She was out in the district much these years, supervising Bible women and village schools, and working with Dr. Parker in all the activities of the Indian church.

Another journey was made to America in 1899 and at the General Conference of 1900 Dr. Parker was elected bishop. He had been in reality a bishop, but now all India rejoiced that his service had been recognized. It was a happy home coming, their return to India, but how soon the joy was clouded! Bishop Parker was a sick man when he left America. Those who knew Mrs. Parker during the months of anxiety in the home at Lucknow and in the hospital at Naini Tal, realized in a new way her fortitude and her cheerful courage. On March 2, 1901, the missionaries gathered in the bishop's house to celebrate the forty-fifth wedding anniversary; on the twentieth of that same month Mrs. Parker went with the Bishop to Naini Tal, and there he died, June 3, 1901.

There was no hesitation in Mrs. Parker's mind after the bishop's death; she had given her life to India, now the obligation was a

double one. She knew the bishop's plans and her advice was invaluable to Bishop Warne who succeeded to the North India administration. Forty-one years of married life in India; now life alone, but still in India and still consecrated to the service of India's men and women, girls and boys.

After a brief period in Moradabad, Mrs. Parker was appointed to Hardoi and in that station she has made her home most of the time since 1901. There were no buildings in Hardoi and she was the only missionary in a district of over a million, a district given to the Methodist church. Such a task appealed to Mrs. Parker's energy and genius for leadership. First a home was built, next a school house. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society readily assumed these obligations. Her relation with the Indian district superintendent and the pastors was very close; she was their missionary superintendent and their "mother," as they affectionately spoke of her. She attended the quarterly conferences and she was always on time. In India, where time is of little value, Mrs. Parker was prompt in attendance at all services. She did not reprove those who were late but she was in her seat before the hour of the meeting. That characteristic made a deep impression on fellow missionaries and Indian Christians.

Mrs. Parker's chief work in Hardoi was the supervision of the school and the Bible women. This service and the many others that Mrs. Parker rendered to the Woman's

Foreign Missionary Society cannot be tabulated. As treasurer of the mission, as field correspondent, as a member of the finance committee, she has been in closest touch with the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society missionaries and with the secretaries of the Society at home. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society counts Mrs. Parker as an honorary missionary of its active ranks. It also honors her as one of the founders of the Society. The missionaries write that she is still the "same wonderful woman she has always been." In the whole Indian field she is today "the senior effective missionary" of our Methodist church.

Mrs. Parker's last visit to America was in 1907, when she came as a delegate to the General Conference. She hastened back to India, for she desires that she may go home to heaven from India and that her earthly resting place may be in the beautiful mountain cemetery where Bishop Parker is buried. It is a great joy to the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society that Mrs. Parker has accepted the invitation to be present at the Jubilee General Executive to be held in Boston, October, 1919. A warm welcome waits this pioneer missionary who is the only living founder of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. She is loved and honored in India; she is loved and honored throughout Methodism in America. May her visit to the homeland be the happiest she has ever had and may she have a safe return to her loved India homeland.